DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 148 759 SP 011 975

AUTHOR Cosentino, Frank
TITLE Sport in the Land of the Beaver, Eagle, and Bear.
PUB DATE May 77
NOTE 16p.; Paper presented as the Maxwell Howell Address, North American Society of Sport Historians (University of Windsor, Windsor, Ontario, May 18-21, 1977)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Athletics; *Cultural Awareness; Foreign Countries; *Government Role; Identification (Psychological); *Nationalism; *National Programs; Self Esteem
IDENTIFIERS *Canada; *Ice Hockey; Sport Sociology

ABSTRACT

The author examines the role sport has played in the past in developing among Canadians an awareness of their national identity. The deleterious effects of Canada's proximity to the United States, especially regarding the lack of success of its national sports organizations to maintain their independence and vitality, are noted. Baseball and football are cited as examples. The change in the social nature of sport, from that of an elitist pastime to a popular recreation, and the concomitant rise of sport as business is described. The changes through which ice hockey, "the Canadian specific," is going are noted with concern. It is recommended that action by the government be taken, specifically at the international level, to preserve the Canadian focus of the sport in face of the self-interest of private enterprise in the form of commercial leagues. (MJB)

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SPORT IN THE LAND OF THE BEAVER, EAGLE AND BEAR

Frank Cosentino
Dept. of Physical Education
and Athletics
York University
Toronto, Canada M3J 1P3

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SPORT IN THE LAND OF THE BEAVER, EAGLE AND BEAR

Frank Cosentino
Dept. of Physical Education and Athletics
YORK UNIVERSITY

The invitation to present the Maxwell Howell Address is a particularly pleasing one for me. As a graduate student at the University of Alberta, I had an opportunity to work with Max for three years.* It was an opportunity to be involved with a man who had a concept; a vision of what was needed and a plan for doing it. Even more so than to-day, it was painfully obvious that a great void existed in the area of Canada's recorded sport history. Through Max Howell's hard work and perseverence, the University of Alberta's Faculty of Physical Education assumed national leadership developing, first, a foundation for sport and later more interpretive studies.

And yet while one has only to look at Alberta's list of theses at the Master's and Doctoral levels to see the great amount of work done in this area, it is also just as obvious that little of the material has made its way downword from the university to the high school and elementary students. Indeed, the general public, dependent upon its information from the media and publishing concerns has been so blithely affected by a cultural amnesia as to be unaware of its roots while looking about enviously at others.

This situation can be likened to a beaver busily engaged in the process of building a home. He moves with some deliberation carrying pieces of wood, seeking out branches, using the mud as mortar. It is obvious from watching him that he functions according to some plan. But imagine that this same purposeful beaver looks up and sights a beautiful high soaring eagle. It is such a magnificent spectacle, its wide wing span allowing it to drift effortlessly, alternately gliding, swooping and circling. It glories in its freedom. The beaver watches with a trace of envy; its imagination attempts to comprehend the essence of the eagle. It's thoughts roam, its

* A paper presented as the Maxwell Howell Address at the North American Society of Sport Historians meeting at the University of Windsor, May 18-21, 1977.

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imagination abounds with the notion of joining the eagle imitating its every move seemingly suspended high about the earth or perched atop its own version of Mount Olympus.

While the beaver is thus entranced, he becomes aware of the noise of brush separating. Looking across the river, he sees a huge and powerful bear making his way forcefully through the thick growth. The beaver changes his focus. The bear moves with purpose. Inevitably the winter will arrive; the bear must be ready. The beaver sees the bear foraging for food. The body must be nourished; the winter will be long. Again the beaver's mind wanders. There is a sense of admiration as the planning, the organization, the sense of intent overshadow the faint notions of the drudgery of the bear's existence. Viewed from afar, the limitations of this slow moving, ponderous, earthbound giant, are momentarily forgotten. The beaver again sees himself ambling alongside the bear, acting deliberately, resolutely preparing for the certain winter and the glorious spring.

The beaver is jarred loose from his wandering imagination by the loud sound of water. He turns to see his home being washed away. The interrupted construction is not strong enough to hold back the welled-up currents. Such is the price of the beaver's day dreams that he would have to start anew to build his home.

By way of this illustration I'm attempting to point out just one of the problems which has developed in Canadian life in general and sport in particular.

On the one hand there is an attraction to a "free" enterprise system; on the other a noticeable need for government involvement. On the one hand there is the direction that politics must not interfere with sport; on the other, the equally accepted notion that sport must not interfere with politics.

Perhaps the most over-riding feature of Canada's existence is its proximity with the United States. The influence of our American neighbour is at the same time both a

welcome and unwelcome feature of our status to-day. Certainly our standard of living would not be as high were the U. S. not our neighbour; but then, neither would our awareness of ourselves as a distinct nation be so low. It should be pointed out that the American influence has not been forced upon us. If anything, it has been willingly accepted. We have eagerly sought after and encouraged the proliferation of American culture in Canadian life. Our books, magazines, newspaper wire services, movies, theatres, television, indeed almost any cultural focus one wishes to mention, are those of the United States. It is a situation more akin to seduction than rape - a seduction which has been ongoing with our full knowledge and consent.

As a result, we Canadians know little of the place sport has enjoyed as a focal point in our society. Take your memories back to September of 1972 and recall the intense emotion, the alternate despair and elation, the enthusiasm which greeted Paul Henderson's final winning goal, the welcome home, the thousands of ordinary people standing in the pouring rain for hours to catch a glimpse or hear a word from anyone connected with Team Canada - no matter whom, it was going to be loudly cheered.

Yet, those scenes have been repeated on countless occasions in almost every area of the country throughout our past. One has only to read the newspapers of the day to see the hold that Ned Hanlan had on the people of the 1870's and 80's. Hanlan's Point on Toronto Island is named after him, but do to-day's citizens know why? Forgotten to the overwhelming majority of Canadians are the long lines awaiting news of one of Hanlan's races, the telegraph offices of the day assuming the same importance and place as the television screen of to-day. His welcomes home were scenes of intense enthusiasm, a world champion as renowned in the United States, England and Australia as he was in Canada. And yet, to-day, who knows of him, much less identifies with him? Where can a school child learn of him?

Hanlan's case is but one example of the many affected

by this cultural amnesia. There are many others: The Paris Crew, Jake Gaudaur, the Men from Zorra, the Edmonton Grads, Billy Sherring, Percy Williams, Marilyn Bell. How can we for example, measure the impact of a sporting personality such as Howie Morenz whose body lay in state at centre ice of the Montreal Forum in order for his many admirers to pay their last respects. Scenes such as these help to contribute to our awareness as a people and yet, do our children learn of them? No because it is much easier to import a mythology rather than develop our own. The SRA reading program in our schools is an excellent example. Most movies, books and other culture shaping media in Canada are really products of another country, another society. They have little to say about us as a people. The obvious result is that since very little is written about Canadians, since few movies are made about Canadians, since even fewer movie houses are owned by Canadians, since few comic book heroes are Canadians, the assumption is made that there must not be any Canadians worth writing about. We can't really blame the Americans - we've opted to take the easy way out.

Examples of the cost of the "free" enterprise approach are common and are ongoing. Reflect back to 1885. Baseball in Canada was a fledgling sport. The Canadian Baseball League was in existence and comprised teams from Toronto, Hamilton, Guelph and London. Canadians were doing well with and among Americans and the league was generally well supported by the public. The players were not declared to be out-and-out professionals, since there was a dirty connotation to the term "professional" but it was evident that the quality of play acted as a focal point for the various Canadian communities.

Enter A. C. Spalding, the U. S. sports equipment man looking to expand his company's business horizons. Baseball in Toronto was undergoing an unprecedented boom. A joint stock company had been formed by five Toronto business men and a new park was built for the 1886 season. On his visit to Toronto in February of 1886, Spalding suggested that an application be made

for a franchise in the National League and immediately set in motion "big league" visions of grandeur.

Less than three weeks later, it was announced that Toronto and Hamilton would forsake the Canadian League in order to join the International League with teams from Oswego, Syracuse, Rochester, Buffalo, Binghampton and Utica - all in the United States. There was some criticism of the move but it was defended by the Hamilton Spectator in an article cited by the Toronto Mail February 24, 1886. It stated in part:

> ... professional baseball is a pure matter of business. Large salaries are paid to the players and heavy expenses are incurred in the management of the teams. Money must be forthcoming or the thing cannot go on. The ball team cannot live on sentiment. It cannot exist on the friendship of Guelph with a deficit in gate receipts. Business is business and in baseball as in everything else, baseball managers are as much entitled to look out for number one as any other class of business man.

And so, Toronto and Hamilton left the Canadian Baseball League to play in the International with visions of reaching the big time in the near future. Toronto, in fact, prospered, winning the peanant in 1887. London meanwhile, after unsuccessfully attempting to function in a new league with Stratford, Woodstock and Brantford, joined the International League thus giving Canada a representation of three teams but also effectively stunting the growth of baseball in the smaller centres.

However, all seemed well in Toronto, Hamilton and London - until 1891. In that year, the league, due to financial problems, ceased operations. A revival of sports took place in Ontario. In Toronto alone, a six team senior league operated along with intermediate and junior sections. The University of Toronto had a flourishing baseball program, its representatives enjoying great success against American and Canadian competition. Inter-town games returned to the sports pages of the newspapers of the day at the expense of American results which had filled the sports pages for many years.

Eventually of course the cycle repeated itself in cities such as Ottawa, Montreal and Vancouver. To-day there are "big league" representatives in Montreal and Toronto but what is the state of baseball in Canada to-day? Is it the focal point for Canadians to-day that it was in the nineteenth century before the arrival of that hope for recognition as a "big league town".

Two of the major sports played in Canada to-day are hockey and football. It's only necessary to review some of the developments in those areas to see that "free enterprise" has not always been tempered by national interests. Probably the two most celebrated trophies in this nation are the Stanley Cup and the Grey Cup. Prior to 1926, the Stanley Cup was truly a national symbol. In that year, Victoria of the Western League was defeated by Montreal Maroons in the finals. The year is significant. It was the last year that cities outside of those represented in the NHL were able to challenge for the trophy. No longer would there be the possibility of a team from Dawson in the Yukon travelling by foot, bicycle, dog sled, steamer and train, to challenge for the Stanley Cup. What had been developing as a truly national focus was dropped.

What had happened? In 1924, the NHL expanded into its first American city, Boston. Being successful there, the league sold the Hamilton franchise in 1925 to New York where it became the Americans. In 1926, teams from Chicago, New York (Rangers) and Detroit were added. In 1934, the Ottawa franchise was transferred to St. Louis. The trend has continued to the present where of the eighteen teams only three are Canadian based. Certainly it can be argued that the players and coaches are Canadian but it's also painfully evident that the character of hockey has changed. The merchandising has become more important than the merchandise; the packaging more important than the product.

In 1931, football in Canada showed an inclination towards this type of trend. In that year, the forward pass was approved for play across the country. It was generally expected that since this was an innovation in style of play, the rate of

development would be the same for all teams and competition would be somewhat equalized. - Except that Warren Stevens from Syracuse University was imported to play for the Montreal AAA team. (Some people added a fourth A and called it the Montreal Almost Amateur Athletic Association) Montreal won the Grey Cup with ease that year giving rise to the myth which was to develop that it was necessary to have an American quarterback in order to win. With the CFL teams to-day, quarterback is not considered to be a "Canadian position". A rush to importation started. Even then it was financially rewarding to win the Grey Cup. Winnipeg, in 1935, signed nine imports for the sum of $7400. (Compare this with the $3.5 million paid by the owner of the Toronto Northmen of the defunct World Football League for three players) When Winnipeg won the Cup for the west's first time, a blueprint for success was developed, a blueprint which was largely responsible for the post-war trend to importation. At this writing 15 of the 32 man roster are American, only 14 being able to play in any given game unless two of the fifteen are designated as quarterbacks. In that case the quarterbacks may alternate at the coaches' whim and the other 13 imports may also play in the game. The situation is such that a team feels itself penalized the use of one import if it has a Canadian playing quarterback. With all the coaches being American, the situation is not likely to change.

Sport has been for so long promoted as a diversion, and, as such, outside the normal and regular aspects of life that the announcement of the Ontario government's intention to prosecute individuals who commit overt acts of violence in the course of sporting competitions has been greeted with much surprise and bombast in some quarters. The move has been long overdue.

Historically, we owe much of our sporting outlook to British influences, strongest during the Victorian era where attitudes were at once classical and yet evolving. Prior to and into the twentieth century, sport was a diversion, something which was engaged in by those with time available - the wealthy

upper classes of society. Sport was never considered to be a serious pursuit by the gentry but at the same time numerous clubs sprang up, all using a common interest in sport as a focal point for socializing. In the midst of these friendly exchanges a gentlemanly code developed: behaviour was expected to be "sportsmanlike"; contravening of the rules was taken to be "not cricket". It was the social atmosphere which was the important part of the game and the same rules of behaviour which governed life off the sporting fields were expected to be in vogue during the game. Not surprisingly, it was this sort of principle which was taken to be one of the hallmarks of the amateur when the concept first made its appearance prior to the 1880s.

As the nineteenth century developed, a democratization of sport occurred. Sport no longer was the province of the wealthy. The masses, sometimes referred to by the gentry as "the rowdy element", acquired the time necessary to participate in sport. Along the models of the upper classes, clubs were formed by this group of society as well, the chief requisite of the sporting ones being athletic skill. Much to the chagrin of the "amateur" class, these skill oriented groups engaged in competitions with their "betters". Invariably problems arose; the one group was looking at the competition from its socializing perspective, the other from the view of demonstrating their skill and winning. Promotors were quick to seize the new opportunity. If the masses had time to participate, they were also free to spectate. Sport was organized into regular competitions, leagues, staffed by players whose major asset was their athletic skill.

What was previously understood by the gentry as "sportsmanlike" behaviour had to be written down in contract form by the newly formed leagues. Thus in the first contract of the National Hockey Association, the forerunner of the NHL, one found clauses legislating against "intemperate, immoral, careless, indifferent" conduct, on or off the ice. At a time

when prudent behaviour was expected of all "civilized" members of society, the Toronto Baseball Club of 1887 gave each player a list of ten rules by which to abide. They were ordered to "conduct themselves in a quiet and gentlemanly manner and guard against practices which will injure their own reputation or that of the Club". Strictly forbidden were: "drinking, carousing, blaspheming and all improper language on or off the field".

In effect, sport operated and developed on two levels. Internally, it was a business complete with legalistic contracts; externally it was accepted by the public as separate from the serious mainstream of life while being held up as an example of virtuous endeavor.

With each new technological advance of the twentieth century guaranteeing more leisure time for the public, the twofold developments continued. New stadia, leagues, the arrival of radio and television, shorter working hours, tax write-offs, depreciation allowances, all combined to make sporting franchises akin to printing money. At the same time, the traditional notions of sport being outside the realm of day to day life were continually being re-inforced with each American court declaration that sport, particularly baseball, was exempt from anti-trust legislation because it, being sport, was not a business.

Increasingly, sport developed its own ethic. Contractual stipulations governing players differed greatly from the "real world". While a person dissatisfied with his employment could resign and seek a new position, within or outside the same industry, the same was not true in the "world of sport". Option clauses, reserve clauses and compensation regulations all evolved to deter such mobility among athletes. Always it was argued that sport merited special consideration. To foster effective competition it was necessary to have such clauses so as to minimize the chances of the wealthier teams attracting the best athletes.

Differences in behaviour for the public also evolved. Outside the arena, a society strove to impart its modes of behaviour on its citizens through its agencies, the family, the school and the church. Inside the arena, however, it was as if a different world existed, a world where all types of threatening, demeaning and boorish behaviour might be seen, yet with no trace of admonition. Taunts and ridicule might be heaped upon a player, coach or official by abusive spectators, their only defence being that "they paid their money and so they have that right". Media representatives, in the interest of meeting a deadline, while creating controversy which might generate a series of stories or defending a faulty forecast have taken out, and, continue to take out, their frustrations on players, coaches or teams. News must be generated, and, to that end all guidelines, in some cases, are thrown out the window. Consideration for the feelings of people or the deference one might normally expect in society is continually shoved aside in this facet of the "world of sport".

The athletes too, have been conditioned by their own separate little world. In sport there is the feeling that the end justifies the means. The defensive back in football, beaten on a passing play, interferes with the receiver: "Better to take the penalty and save the touchdown than to give up six easy points". The hockey player, chasing an opponent on a breakaway, is encouraged to foul or trip him in order to save his team from a "sure goal". Indeed these instances have become so commonplace in sport that our coaches and commentators refer to the tactic as "taking the good penalty". Anything to win the game, including the use of "policemen" and intimidation tactics, has found its way into the new sporting ethic being developed: if you have to do it to win, do it!

And yet it's not evident that society really wants this new morality for sport. Just as the Watergate investigation uncovered the "dirty tricks" being used to insure a political election victory; just as anti-combines legislation is being

revised to insure against unethical behaviour among business concerns in the free enterprise system, so too sport seems to be arriving at the same conclusions. Perhaps the advances of the twentieth century have been too many and too fast and society has not had a chance to evaluate how best they can be used for the benefit of all rather than the few. In any event, it appears that a closer look must be taken at sport. Is it separate from society or does it have the same goals and boundaries? Sport as an activity helps us to develop and define our humanity. It enables us to explore and at the same time define our limits. Creativity becomes enhanced by the limits set forth in our games. Should those limits be set aside and ignored in the interests of selfish expediency, whether in sport or any other facet of society, erosion can only be followed by disappearance.

In Canada, hockey has been called the Canadian specific. It helps define who we are and as such can be regarded as a national asset. If those in charge of our hockey programs are unable or unwilling to operate all leagues as a link in the chain of our culture contributing to the integrity of our society, new people should be given the opportunity to operate the game. Or steps should be taken to ensure that the development of the people playing hockey as well as the game itself, is in harmony with our societal goals.

But what are our societal goals? Therein lies the problem; therein the fascination of the beaver with the bear. Certainly the use of sport as a political instrument is not one to which the majority of Canadians would subscribe. Neither is it intended to suggest that the Soviet approach to sport should be adopted; although it should be added that Canada has accepted many of the concepts put forward by the Eastern Europeans. The Canada Games, Game Plan, National teams, a badge and certification system, Minister of Sport, are only some. What is being suggested is that an approach previously adopted in

other spheres of Canadian life be applied to the sporting arena.

Because of the huge geography of the country, the relatively small population, the proximity of the United States, language divisions, regional disparity etc., it has been necessary, and expected, that the government would intervene in those areas deemed to be necessary for the essence of nationhood. The object of the intervention was to develop policies consistent with the needs of the majority of the people. In other words, an attempt has been made to wed the private sector with the public interest. Thus it is possible in the Canadian "free enterprise" system to see government corporations competing with and supplementing private ones; the CBC and CTV; the CNR and CP; Air Canada and CP Air.

With reference to sport there has been an increasing amount of government involvement in the area. The Report of the Task Force on Sport has been a blueprint for government involvement in the seventies. Some will say that there is too much government involvement in the area of sport now and present a very good argument for that position.

Yet it is respectfully submitted that in the sport of hockey, specifically at the international level, new government initiatives are needed in view of the self interest of private enterprise in the form of the commercial leagues.

It is redundant to say that hockey is the Canadian specific. It is one, major, identifiable characteristic of Canada and Canadians. In this country a television viewing audience of 4,000,000 for a program is considered to be outstanding. Viewing ratings for Hockey Night in Canada, even though in decline since 1972 are consistently higher. In 1972, during the first international series between Canada and the Soviet Union it was estimated that upwards of eighty percent of the population of Canada saw the final decisive game of the series. Among the euphoric reactions of Canadians was William Hutt, who while reciting a soliloquy at Stratford's Shakespearian

Theatre, was given the score by a prompter. Interrupting his speech he turned to the audience, announced that Canada had won 6-5, shared in the deafening applause and returned to his stage presentation. In London, Ontario, a group of high school students watching a football game while listening through their transistors to the hockey game broke out in a spontaneous rendition of the national anthem. An exuberant young Newfoundlander watching television in his recreation room, jumped up from his couch, throwing his arms in the air in emulation of a goal scorer, breaking his outstretched fingers on the low ceiling.

If sport helps define our humanity, hockey defines it better than any other sport. We call ourselves the best in the world. Our Stanley Cup finalists have played for the "World's Championship". Indeed we have been conditioned for generations to believe we are the best. When our string of Olympic Championships ended in 1952, we said: "well, they're only amateur". A mixture of re-instated professionals won our last world championship in 1961. They, too, were outmoded by the fast learning Europeans and were replaced by the commendable concept of a national team formed specifically for world championship competition. Unfortunately the concept came at a time when the National Hockey League was undergoing expansion. The whole program was totally undermined. In 1969 Canada announced that it was withdrawing from further world championships unless it could send its best players (ie) those in the NHL. Hockey Canada was set up to guide the sport and Canadians sat back smug in the knowledge that they would dictate the terms for re-entry into the world tournament. The comeback victory of an over confident Team Canada in 1972 allayed some early fears. Victories by the Soviet Union over Team Canada '74, subsequent tours by the Soviets and resulting decline in interest in the style of play in the commercial league, led to the development of the Canada Cup, a concept which would allow the best players in the world to play in a tournament at a time not in conflict with the commercial league

schedules. In return for its approval of the Canada Cup, the International Ice Hockey Federation insisted that Canada return to the World championships of 1977. Moreover, it declared that Canada was free to send whomever it wanted as its representatives.

Yet with the puck in Canada's possession, she chose to ice it. It is only too painfully obvious that the public and national interest was overlooked in favor of commercial gain. Canada's representatives were chosen from players of the ten out of eighteen teams who were not in the play-offs for the Stanley Cup. Aside from the fourth place finish of Team Canada, its players chose to act in a less than sportsmanlike fashion.

But, one cannot blame the players. If sport is important as a cultural manifestation; if hockey is an expression of our national being, the railway of the present confederation linking east with west; if all this is true there is justification in demanding a re-orientation of hockey in this country.

The packaging has become more important than the product; the merchandising has become more important than the merchandise. It no longer reflects the legitimate aspirations of the Canadian public who have been told for so long that they have the best; they want it proven and if it cannot be verified on the ice, it is asked only that the team lose with maximum effort and grace.

Throughout Canada's history, there has been a tendency to lose sight of the Canadian focus in much of our sporting culture. We have seen it in our literature, in our films, in almost all of our media expression. It has occurred in our dominant team sports at a national level. Clearly it is happening in hockey at the International level; the evidence from the past is there for all to see. The beaver is neither eagle nor bear; when it tries to be one or the other, problems arise. When its industry is in concert with its basic interests, it flourishes. So too with sport in Canada.